

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

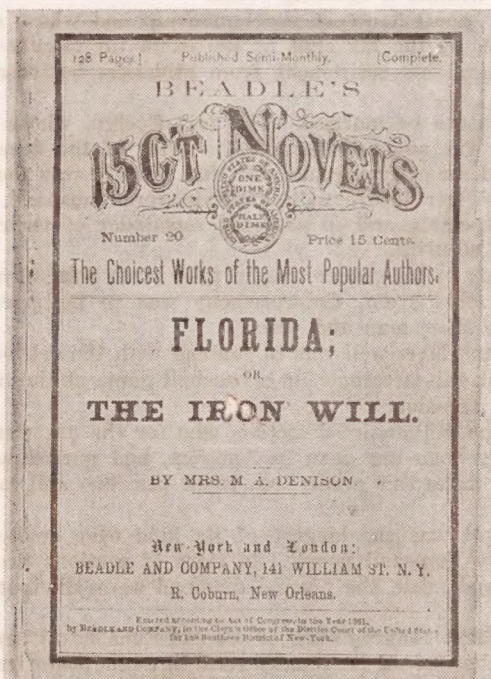
Vol. 42 No. 10

October 15, 1973

Whole No. 493

FRANK MERRIWELL vs. FRED FEARNOT

By Ralph P. Smith



DIME NOVEL SKETCHES NO. 165

BEADLES 15c NOVELS

Publisher: Beadle & Co., 141 William St., New York, N. Y. Issues: 22. Schedule of Issue: Unknown (the first 16 issues were probably en masse while Nos. 17 through 22 were semi-monthly). Dates: Probably late 1860 the May 1, 1861. Size: 6 $\frac{5}{8}$ x4 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Pages: 96 to 128. Price: 15c. Illustrations: None. Contents: Same titles as the first 22 issues of Beadles Dime Novels. These were issued by Beadle to be sold in the south where due to transportation charges the price of 10c was too little. They ceased publication with the start of the Civil War.

FRANK MERRIWELL vs. FRED FEARNOT**By Ralph P. Smith****INTRODUCTION**

Ralph Smith originally wrote this story in 1928 and the news stories mentioned need to be regarded in that context. It appeared as a serial in Frank T. Fries "Frank Reade Library" September through December 1928, Vol. 1 No. 1 through 4. Frank Fries was an avid dime novel hobby magazine publisher during the late 20's and early 30's.

It was a gala day in Fredonia!

Never in the history of the town had so many people been seen in the quiet little village. Never in the history of the town had such a continuous flood of humanity been poured into the streets from trains, automobiles and, yes—even airplanes. Never in the history of the world had there congregated so huge a throng to witness a sporting event.

Fred Fearnot, whose feats of sportsmanship and whose deeds of daring had been chronicled to the far ends of the earth for twenty-five consecutive years, had announced his retirement from athletics, business and all forms of active life.

Tonight he was to be married. The fair Evelyn, whose regard for him had never waned, was about to become the bride of the famous young man, of Fredonia. Fred, in marrying, decided that his life was too full of pitfalls and danger to risk her future with an endangered husband, and decided to retire to his large estate and so pass the remainder of their days in a well earned peace and security.

A fitting climax to his career was to take place this afternoon, and upon the conclusion of this event, the ceremony was to be privately performed which would make them man and wife.

The great Frank Merriwell was to contend with the celebrated Fred Fearnot at three o'clock this afternoon in a baseball game at the new bowl erected especially for the occasion.

Dick Dobbs, the Millionaire detective, who for the past ten years had collected more money than any man in America, had parted with considerable of his finances to make this great, free event possible, and to allow all interested to attend.

The great bowl was the largest of its kind ever erected. Seating one million and twenty thousand people, its tiers of sections arose on all sides, like skyscrapers and made the normal diamond seem diminutive by comparison.

This was the last congregating of the old dime novel heroes, and it was to be something that would be remembered through posterity.

Tex Rickard had accepted the responsibility of staging the affair, and had done himself proud in all phases of the undertaking.

The Bradys had been commissioned by the Government to look after the

DIME NOVEL ROUNDUP—Vol. 42, No. 10, Whole No. 493—October 15, 1973
Published monthly at 821 Vermont St., Lawrence, Kansas 66044. Edited by Edward T. LeBlanc, 87 School St., Fall River, Mass. 02720. Second class postage paid at Lawrence, Kansas 66044. Assistant Editor, Ralph F. Cummings, 161 Pleasant St., South Grafton, Mass. 01560. Subscription: \$5.00 per year. Ad rates—10c per word; \$2.00 per column inch; \$4.00 per quarter page; \$6.00 per half page and \$10.00 per full page. Ads should be submitted by the 15th of the month in order to assure publication in the following month's issue.

Postmaster: Send form 3579 to 821 Vermont St., Lawrence, Kans. 66044

law abiding element, for this affair was of such tremendous proportions, that one person in every hundred in the United States was to be a witness. The white haired old man in blue, could be seen talking with a younger man, dressed as himself in the shadow of the dome on the home plate grandstand. They, with a special crew, aided by Ted Strong's Rough Riders, policed the place and kept all in order.

"Well, Fred," said Terry Olcott, "I don't know who is the more nervous, you or I. Nor do I know who will be the more nervous tonight, old chap, for both ceremonies are affairs in which I never joined before."

Fred was opening letters and telegrams in their room. Mostly they were congratulations for the double wedding to take place that night. Some were congratulations from old enemies, who wished them well. A few were bitter slurs cast by bitter enemies, who neither forgot nor forgave. Largely they were regrets from old heroes who could not attend.

"Nick Carter cannot come," said Fred, laying aside a long letter. "He is working on the 'Cyclops' case, you know, the ship that left port and was never seen again."

"If Nick is on that affair, then," said Terry, "It's in the hands of the world's most experienced man."

(Editor's Note: Latest word is to effect that Nick is tracing "Cyclops" with the aid of Frank Reade, Jr., and his latest electric submarine boat.)

"The Three Chums, Ben Bright, Tom True and Dot Dare will be here," Fred said "You know they started working for the Tousey publications about the same time we did. Gee, I'll be glad to see them."

"Me too," laughed Terry. "Hope they bring Little Pun with them. But I guess Punny will be about forty years old now."

"Yes, that's the trouble Terry. If we put this off much longer, all the old crowd will have passed on to better fields of endeavor. Even now many are gone."

"Makes a fellow feel old," laughed Terry. You saw where Young Klondike and Klondike Kit palled it off down in the Kimberly African mine region and both succumbed to fever down there."

"Tough," answered Fred. "Old Broadbrim died seven years ago, and Old Cap Collier ten years ago."

"After the public gets tired reading of a fellow, he may as well die," said Terry gloomily.

The doorbell rang at this moment and voices were heard in the hall. Fred looked out to see who.

It was an old man, tall, but stooped a little. He wore a pair of baggy trousers and sneakers. He had no hat, and his hair was long. His face was tanned to the color of dark copper, and strong, black eyes looked out from under a strong, straight brow. Most characteristic was a dirty, red blanket, which he had draped over one shoulder.

"How?" he grunted, when he saw Fred. "Joe, he look for um Strong-heart. Boy on street say find um here. Joe look, no see. Joe eyes no godd no more."

"Hello," cried Fearnot, "Can it be Old Joe Crowfoot?"

"Joe body here. Heart no here. Spirit no here. Joe should be in Happy Hunting Grounds heap long time ago. Many moons since Joe see Strong-heart. Think um never see no more. Joe go away in hills to die. No die. Joe here Strongheart here. Joe think um come see. Joe leave um West when snow come. Just now get here. No can move good now. Never see um snow again. Joe stiff in um joints. No last much longer. Heap fine to see Strongheart. Show um me."

Fred was delighted to see the old savage and directed him to Merriwell's

abode. The rate at which Joe went in that direction belied his statement of weakness; but Fred knew the failings of the Indian, among which was a delusion, either fancied or real, that he was getting weaker all the time.

Although the Red Man must have been seventy-five years old, he had crossed the great continent just to glimpse his old friend, to whom, long years ago, he had entrusted his ward, Dick Merriwell.

"Well, you old reprobate," smiled Frank Merriwell, as he shook the wrinkled hand of Old Joe Crowfoot. "I swear you haven't changed one little bit in all the years."

Old Joe grunted, a look of real pleasure in the usually expressionless countenance. "Strongheart say fine words. Old Joe glad. Old Joe see young man, where older man should be. Strongheart like oak tree that stand wind and many storms. Old Joe like fruit tree that live awhile and bimeby fall with heavy rain. When heart is strong, body strong."

There was quite a gathering in Merry's rooms. Out from one of the adjoining rooms strode a handsome youthful looking man with dark hair and eyes. But two words were spoken: "Old Joe." "Injun Heart."

There was a happy reunion in the rooms that morning. Old friends were coming and going every hour, but a few stayed on. These few consisted of the ball nine that Frank had selected, and a few ladies. Among the women were Elsie Hodge, Inza Merriwell, June Merriwell, Winnie Badger and Mrs. Buckhart.

Many happy hours were spent in talking over old times. The perils that had beset them in foreign lands, the fun and adventures on the stage, on the railroad, the grand tour of America, when they had become the world's champions in the amateur class, the wonderful times in the Mad River Baseball league, the terrible adventures that Frank and Dick had gone through to retain possession of their "Queen Mystery" and other mines left them by their father. And so on; the veritable history of their lives was spun, scene by scene. A listener-in would have heard of Frank Merriwell's great idea: "The American School of Athletic Development." One would have heard of winning the Olympics by Dick Merriwell and of him losing his fortune in a South American revolution. Then would have been the founding of "The Merriwell Company," which tackled projects of all sizes and descriptions.

At the present time, Frank had settled down, as head of his Athletic School, with Bart Hodge and Bruce Browning head of "The Merriwell Co.," and Frank's son, Frank, Jr., was managing a division of the Airmail.

Many glances of admiration were cast at Merry by Bert Hodge. His usual dark countenance was aglow with pleasure at the reception tendered Frank and his chums. Things had not always been thus. Bart could remember not so many years ago that an old college or school acquaintance of his and Frank's would warmly greet Merriwell, to cast him barely a cold nod. Tonight, however, many were the hearty handshakes he had received. Those who had misunderstood him in the past, more than made up for it.

Merry had been figuring on the back of a long envelope, and turning to the boys said: "You men are going to start the ball rolling this afternoon. If you are all in condition you'll stay in, but if anyone shows any signs of being winded, I'm going to bench him. I don't want to start back home with a trainful of invalids. This applies to myself, too."

"Count me out now," grunted Bruce Browning, puffing at a meercaum pipe. "I'm winded before we start."

"You're going to start," laughed Merry. "I've heard you say those very same words before. And, for a fat man, I've yet to see anyone with as much pep as you manifest, once you get into action."

"Trouble is," put in Buckhart, "He sure doesn't start till about the eighth

inning." But Brad was silenced by a pillow buried in his face.

"Here's the lineup fellows," called Frank. "See what you think of it." Buckhart, c. f.; Gallup, l. f.; Rattleton, r. f.; Merriwell, R., 1 b.; Mulloy, 2 b.; Browning, 3 b.; Diamond, s. s.; Merriwell, F., p.; Hodge, c.

"Fine," cried Dick Merriwell. "There's only one troubling thing, Frank. You haven't left a place for Cap'n Wiley."

"What ho, mates," came a voice from the corridor, "who's taking my name in vain?" And into the room came a strange spectacle.

He was of medium height, but inclined to stoutness, but his dress was the most arresting feature. He wore a felt hat, a red sweater, a pair of plus-fours, checkered blue socks and patent leather shoes.

"Cap'n Wiley," Frank greeted him. "So they haven't killed you off yet?"

"Still on the globe, mate," chuckled Wiley. "The report of my demise was greatly exaggerated, so I just thought I'd heave to and cast anchor, as I wrote brother Richard. Brother Richard knew I was coming, didn't you Dick? Why hello Chief," he added, catching sight of Old Joe Crowfoot, "I thought you'd have vanished from this terrestrial sphere ere now. Put her there Old Sock-in-the-wash."

"How, Breeze Mouth," grunted Old Joe.

"May your shadow never grow less," said Wiley. "Now mates, I'll tell you how come I've just come. When I was notified of this little re-union, I was running silk from Japan to Mexico. I shook out all sail, weighed anchor and boxed the compass. Before long, I was headed in a straight line for here. I noticed a cloud of black smoke in the sky, but didn't pay much attention to it. However, ere long, it began to settle down into the sea and no matter which way you lookt you couldn't see a thing. You couldn't see the sea. I was standing at the wheel and I felt this dark cloud getting thick. Before long I could hardly move at all."

"And then what," asked Dick.

"And then, realizing I was in a fix, I put my stupendous intellect to work on the problem. To call for help was of no avail, for if I couldn't move, how could the crew? For days and days, I just stood there at the wheel, powerless to move, and knowing not whither I drifted. Finally I hit upon an idea which would release me from this cloud."

"Phwat was it?" asked Barney Malloy. "Did yez foind a knife?"

"Mates," said the Cap'n, "It's plain to be seen I am disbelieved. I refuse to disclose my plan. It was not needed anyway. The cloud started to get thinner, and at length I was freed. It was a close call. I had gone a hundred miles off my course, grown an inch of beard and lost fifteen pounds. But say! I almost forgot something. A gentleman handed me this letter and asked me to give it to Frank."

Merry opened the letter. It was written in two sentences. It read: "The Magic Spectacles. A Man to be Avenged."

"What is that nonsense Frank?" asked Diamond.

"Phew-ew-ew-ew!" whistled Merry.

The great bowl was filled to capacity, except for a few sections of the top tier, and into these remote seats, a steady file of persons wended their way across the narrow aisles, and numerous feet extended thereinto. It was a noisy and boisterous crowd, but withal a happy one.

Behind the batter's position was a stand, built out from the rest of the grandstand, which was gaily bedecked with bunting and flags and which housed some one hundred individuals of evident importance. On either side of the President of The United States, were Cummings and Smith, of The Happy Hours Brotherhood, and next to Cummings was Fries, who was instrumental in bringing Frank Merriwell back in 1927, to Sport Story readers, and

beside them and in back, were the rank and file of the Happy Hours Boys, due to whose united efforts, this tremendous spectacle had been arranged. Its members, ranging from California to Maine, were all present, and a happy, joyous crowd they were.

Lining the bases and before the wings of the grandstand were long boxes full of people in all manner of dress and appearance. There were about half a hundred in each section, in which was also housed the respective nines of Fearnot and Merriwell. These people were the old dime novel heroes and friends who were able to attend the gathering.

In addition to the field glasses in each row, were acousticon phones, which were connected with the umpire's positions in the underground boxes. It was evident that those who failed to see all, could at least hear what they missed seeing, either directly from the umpires, as they announced each play, or from Graham McNamee, who was broadcasting from a special tower erected over the roof of the Happy Hours Brotherhood box, and two of his friends: Mr. Rickard and his stenographer.

The snappy outfit, known as the Young Rough Riders, was patrolling the grounds on horseback. But it seemed that in such an orderly group, no police protection was necessary. However, scattered at various distances were plain clothes detectives, most of whom had figured in some novel of the past.

It was just ten minutes before play was to be announced.

Off in section DZF, a gathering of men, half a dozen in number, were displaying a placard, which one could read, with the aid of field glasses: "GOOD LUCK FEARNOT." Disdaining an invitation to sit with the other heroes, the "Chickering Set" had assembled, hoping to see the final downfall of Frank Merriwell.

Ollie Lord, in his choker, and Lew Venzie, foppishly lisping his animosity, were being frowned upon by that master hypocrite, Chickering, himself, who was saying, "Oh, I say now: Let's have fair play. I hope the best man wins."

In the boxes opposite third base, where sat the Merriwell nine, Bart Hodge was walking up and down, thumping his fist into his gloved left hand. At his side was big Bruce Browning, no less excited.

"Here's the note," exclaimed Hodge, handing over a telegram. This is what Merry handed me at 2:00 o'clock, as he grabbed his hat and ran."

Browning read the telegram, which was addressed to Frank. It was as follows: "Passing through Fredonia enroute to coast. Try see me. Train in 2:00 o'clock. Signed, Felicia Delores."

"Who the heck is Felicia Delores?" exploded Bruce.

"She was Dick's Western childhood playmate," explained Bart. "She is also his cousin. Dick went with Frank. Neither of them has seen or heard of her for twenty long years. She went to Spain and stayed with relatives. She is Spanish, and of course you know Dick Merriwell's mother was a Spanish lady."

"Well, they ought to be back by now. It's five minutes to three and almost time for the game to begin. What are we going to do?"

"That's a question.—Hello, here's Dick!"

Dick Merriwell came into the tunnel under the grandstand in a slow trot. He came right up to Hodge and Browning and grabbed the former by the shoulder.

"Frank's missing!" he cried. "He never reached the station. Where he went, or what happened, no one knows. I should have stayed and helped in the hunt, but the game must go on—We can't disappoint all these people. Doesn't it beat the Dutch?" Dick gritted his teeth. "I sent Bowery Billy over to see if he could locate Frank. Look! There are the umpires!"

Frank Manley and Dick Daresome strolled out onto the diamond.

As Daresome adjusted his mask behind the plate, Manley strode out to beyond the pitcher's box, while the Fearnot team came in off the field.

A mighty cheer went up.

Fred Fearnot strode out to meet and talk with the umpire.

A tremendous ovation was given him.

Dick Merriwell entered the Diamond.

While there was considerable cheering and a tremendous noise, one could notice an undercurrent of surprise that welled through the crowd and hear the oft repeated question: "Where's Frank?"

A coin was tossed, and Merriwell's team took the field and Fearnot's team prepared to bat.

The umpire, Manley, removed his cap and took a step or two forward. He held up his hand for a few minutes before the crowd quieted down, and then he made the announcement:

"Ladies - and - gentlemen! Bat - teries for today! Fearnot's team: Fearnot and Olcott! Merriwell's team: Wiley and Hodge!

First, a stunned crowd. Then, an angry crowd. And finally, a throaty crowd took up the yell, "Where is Merriwell! We want Frank Merriwell!"

Up in section DZF, a half dozen genuine disappointed bloods received this announcement in disgust.

"Jutht like him," lisped Lew Veazie. "Knew he'd get knocked out of the bokth, tho he took a thneak."

"Do not worry," advised Chickering, "It's Merriwell's old gag. If he didn't pull this stunt, it would not seem like old times. That drunken sailor will blow up in the first; Richard Merriwell will rescue the team and then, in turn, will start to slump in the eighth; and lo, in the first of the ninth, in will come Mr. Frank Merriwell, bowing and scraping to the roar of the crowd. In that way, both the Merriwell boys will get all the credit for pulling the team out of a bad hoie; and if the game is lost they will say it isn't the fault of either of them. But I'm terribly afraid they will be too late."

"Thath jutht the way I feel about it deah boy," simpered Veasie, and the rest of the set agreed.

Walter Wiley was terribly nervous. He stretched his arms as if to insure there elasticity. He watched the bases as though he were afraid one might vanish, should he turn his back. He checked over the fielders as though he expected to discover four the next time he looked.

"Play ball," cried the umpire.

Swinging his arm like a windmill a half dozen times, Wiley spun the ball over for a neat drop, and Olcott, who headed the list, fouled it into the bleachers.

"That's finding it," roared the crowd.

The next was an outcurve, which Terry simply looked at. Another was not just satisfactory, and he let it pass.

Wiley started the ball down near the ground, and turning a half circle, put one over the plate.

"Two and two," said the umpire.

"You've got him guessing," piped a shrill voice from the grandstand. "Guess those movements hypnotize 'em."

Terry made a swing at the next and missed. He was out.

Wiley bewildered the next two batters, and the side was retired.

The Merriwells could do nothing against Fred, who retired the side with twelve pitched balls.

Wiley passed the first batter, and then struck out the next two. The third got a single, he passed the fourth, and that filled the bases.

Hodge and Wiley held a consultation.

"Mate," said Wiley, "I'll razzle-dazzle this next bird."

"Wiley," growled Hodge, "Better try to pitch, and never mind this clock-winding business."

The Marine Marvel seemed not at his best; at least the breaks went against him. He got the next batter with three balls and two strikes, but the batter refused the next ball, was passed and forced in a run.

Dick Merriwell and the Marine Marvel changed places, and Dick struck the next man out with three pitched balls, retiring the side. Score. 1-0.

At this moment a taxicab tore along the grandstand and stopped.

Out jumped Frank Merriwell, bareheaded and all out of breath.

A joyous shout went up from the crowd.

The boys crowded around Merry for a few moments, while the Fearnots took their position in the field.

"Did you see Felicia?" queried Dick, in a quickening in his voice, at the thought of his boyhood playmate so near at hand.

"It was not Felicia," replied Frank. "As I was running down to the station to meet the train, a car came along and I was offered a lift. There are two depots here you know, and Dick went to the other. I didn't have a great deal of time and was glad to ride. The chauffeur let me get in the rear compartment, where there was a man of medium age. We chatted awhile and suddenly he leaned over and asked: 'Do you remember the Magic spectacles?'"

"That's what the note said," cried Hodge excitedly.

"Yes, it referred to a man who was out to 'get' me. Had almost dedicated his life to the task. I refer to Porfias Del Norte, or Santenel, as he was likewise known. These spectacles played an important part in a little drama one day in the mountain region. He tried to hurl me off a moving train, but my magic spectacles enabled me to see what transpired behind my back and I fooled the villain easily. I swear, although the man has been dead for twenty years, I almost thought he was re-incarnated in the stranger at my side. As the car left the road to the station and entered an old wood road, he shot that question at me. I was stunned for a moment, but my wits were working and I asked him what the joke was. He said he was Del Norte, and although I thought him dead, he could not die; not even cave-ins, burning buildings, nor explosions had any effect on him. He was going to live until he killed me, and then die of old age. He actually seemed insane. I tried to calm him, so asked him what he knew of Felicia.

A soft light came into his eyes and he said: "I know all about Felicia, her health, her happiness. I know you love her. I know the whole story from her own lips, but that will not save you. I tricked you through her tales of your brother. It was a shock when first she mentioned your name to me, but I was foxy enough to hide my hatred of you from her. I listened and plotted and knew the time would come when I could use her name to decoy you. A Del Norte does not strike without warning; and I sent you a note, knowing you would understand, but others would not."

"Well, boys, we soon had a battle royal, in which the driver of the car joined. That man seemed as strong as two ordinary men. It was by the sheerest luck that I held my own until Bowery Billy arrived on the scene and took a hand. I won't tell the whole story now. Suffice it to say Del Norte relented, and said it was bred in the bone to hate me.

"Was it really Porfias Del Norte," asked Hodge.

"Certainly not. I saw him blown to pieces with my own eyes. But I recall how, a dozen times I thought I had seen him die, only to find that in one miraculous manner or another he had again escaped death. No, it was his son, Felipe Del Norte, in whom the name of Merriwell awoke the sparks of revenge the father had dedicated himself to.

"Where is he now?" asked Dick. "And Felicia?"

"Bowery Billy is escorting him to the train. He is returning to Mexico. He will not bother us again. He has weighed his hatred of me against the love of his wife, and the latter won out. 'Felicia Del Norte will be glad to have us both visit them,'" he said.

The last of the ninth.

The great gathering had watched a pitchers' battle between Fred Fearnot and Frank Merriwell. The score still stood 1-0 in favor of the Fearnots. Both pitchers held the batters down and scarce five men had reached first base.

Inza Merriwell was sitting beside Evelyn, Fearnot's bride-to-be. "Oh, Evelyn," she exclaimed as she squeezed her hand, "This is the happiest day of yours and Fred's lives. I wonder if Frank would think me unkind if I said 'I hope Fred wins?' With his last game a winning, nothing would mar the marriage ceremony tonight. As for Frank:—It would mean only another victory."

The Merriwell nine were making ready to fight for a run in this last inning, which would tie the game.

The Chickering set had it all doped out, and Ollie Lord was nodding and nodding like a ventriloquist's dummy as Veazie said: "It'th a fwame-up. Merriwell'th team getth a wun and tieth. The game goeth on faw a dothen more innin'gth and ith finally called on account of darkneth."

Dick Merriwell was the first man up. He hit the first ball for a single bag, and Mulloy came up. Barney sacrificed him to second. Browning hit a single, on which Dick went to third.

Now the crowd began to roar for the Merriwells to "come through."

With a man on first and one on third, and only one out, Diamond came to the plate. He was retired on three pitched balls.

It seemed as though Fred had tightened up.

In the meantime Browning stole second.

A mighty roar came from the crowd, as Frank Merriwell advanced to the plate.

"Good Bye Fearnot," started to the tune of "Bye Bye Blackbird" in the bleachers and was taken up by Merriwell sympathizers, while those who favored Fred started to hiss. The din was terrific.

Pale, but determined, Fearnot faced Merriwell.

With an enigmatic smile Frank Merriwell awaited the first ball.

"Crack!" The ball sailed out—out—and, yes!—over the fence!

"Foul ball!" cried the umpire. "To the right of first base."

Again Fred wound up and delivered the ball.

"Crack!" In almost the same place, another foul.

Now was the deciding moment of the game.

Frank looked at Fred. Visibly nervous, Fred steeled himself for the next ball to put over to the famous Yale graduate.

On it came, like a bullet!

Frank struck—and missed by a foot!

"Batter out," shrieked the umpire. "Side retired. Game over."

Fred Fearnot's team had won by a score of 1-0.

A mighty throng poured into the diamond. It split in two sections. One crowd carried Fred; the other Frank, around and around the field. The band struck up "Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot," and every one cheered, shouted and made gay and happy noises.

That night Bart Hodge grabbed Merriwell by the shoulders and his face was dark as he cried, "Frank! Frank! After two cracks at the ball, you missed the last one by a mile! Don't tell me you didn't do that on purpose! Don't tell me you didn't do that just because your sympathy was all with Fred!"

Own up!

Frank laughed.

**STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP,
MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION**(Act of October 23, 1962; Section 4369,
Title 39, United States Code)

Date of filing: Oct. 1, 1973

Title of Publication:

Dime Novel Roundup

Issued monthly.

Office of Publication: 321 Vermont St.,
Lawrence, Douglas County, Kansas
66044

General Business Offices:

87 School Street, Fall River, Mass.
02720

Publisher:

Edward T. LeBlanc, 87 School St.,
Fall River, Mass. 02720

Editor:

Edward T. LeBlanc, 87 School St.,
Fall River, Mass. 02720

Managing Editor:

Edward T. LeBlanc, 87 School St.,
Fall River, Mass. 02720

Owner:

Edward T. LeBlanc, 87 School St.,
Fall River, Mass. 02720Bondholders, Mortgagees, or Security
Holders: None

	Avg. No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months	Single issue nearest to filing date
Total no. copies printed	500	500

Paid circulation

Sales thru dealers, car-
riers, vendors, etc.

0 0

Mail subscriptions

356 355

Total paid circulation

356 355

Free distribution

0 0

Total distribution

356 355

Office use, left-overs, etc.

144 145

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